



Frankfort/Kentucky

State schools awarding degrees at a record pace

By **MARK R. CHELLGREN**
Associated Press Writer

But Kentucky still trails nation in education

Kentucky colleges and universities awarded record numbers of degrees and diplomas during the most recent school year, concrete progress toward the decade-long effort to improve the educational attainment of Kentuckians.

The 37,371 educational achievements awarded in the 2004-2005 year totaled nearly 9 percent more than the previous year's number.

Council on Postsecondary Education President Thomas Layzell said the figures show marked progress down a road whose end is barely in sight.

Kentucky has long lagged behind the rest of the nation in educational attainment, a factor often blamed for its similar place near the bottom of per capita income.

One of the primary directives of the 1997 higher education overhaul by the General Assembly was to get educational attainment in Kentucky to the national average in 20 years.

But just to get to the national average of citizens with a bachelor's degree will require a doubling of the current 400,000 Kentuckians who have completed a four-

year college program, Layzell said.

"We've got a long, long way to go," Layzell said in an interview Thursday.

The total includes two- and four-year associate's and bachelor's degrees, but also many more master's, doctoral and professional degrees, plus certificates and diplomas earned largely as a result of occupational education.

Among the intriguing stories behind the statistics is the growth of so-called certificates and diplomas.

They are earned after completion of

more modest amounts of class work — 12 to 36 credit hours for a certificate and 36 to 68 hours for a diploma — that is largely geared to specific work or occupational tasks.

The courses are mostly offered by technical colleges. In the case of a diploma, it can mean the same credit load required for an associate's degree but usually without the general education basics required for a two-year diploma.

"It's a positive development," Layzell said.

The key will be to get those people moving along toward bachelor's degrees, and that has been made simpler by universities who are now accepting virtually all of the class work earned along the way.

"We're not just handing degrees to them, but we've got to strike those barriers down," Layzell said.

The statistics were compiled by the council and do not include degrees awarded by the numerous private colleges, universities and education outlets in Kentucky.